

****ATTENTION****

This document is provided for historical purposes only.

Documents contained in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Document & Publication Archive may contain dated and/or incorrect information. The WDFW Document & Publication Archive is provided as a service to those interested in the history of fish and wildlife management in Washington State.



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE

16018 Mill Creek Blvd., Mill Creek, WA 98012

Tel. (206) 775-1311

Hummingbirds in Western Washington

Hummingbirds are a favorite of most people. Their small size, bright colors, and amazing flight make them unique among birds. Did you know that:

- hummingbird wing beats may reach 200 per second, propelling the bird up to 50 mph during courtship display flights.
- not only can hummingbirds hover, they can also fly backwards or upside down.
- if you had a tongue as proportionally long as that of a hummingbird, you could lick an ice cream cone 12 feet away without moving your head.
- if you weighed 150 pounds and had the same rate of metabolism as a hummingbird, you would eat 300 pounds of food and 155,000 calories each day.
- hummingbirds may breathe 273 times per minute and have a heart rate of 1200 beats per minute when excited.

Only two species of hummingbirds are usually found in western Washington. The most common is the Rufous Hummingbird, found here during the spring and summer months. The other, the Anna's Hummingbird, is a more recent immigrant from areas south of Washington. It is much less common, but it may stay in this area during all months of the year.

Both species make a cup nest, usually placed 20 feet or lower in the branches of a tree or shrub. Only two eggs are laid, and each is less than 1 inch long.

While most people are aware that hummingbirds eat nectar from flowers (and, in so doing, help in pollination of plants), many do not realize that hummingbirds also eat insects. Hummingbirds can be attracted to a sugar solution in a feeder, and this is one way for a backyard wildlife manager to enjoy these birds.

Hummingbird feeders

Hummingbird feeders can be purchased, or you can make your own feeders from test tubes or bottles. Place the feeders where you will be able to observe the birds from inside your home or near sitting areas in your garden. The feeder should be placed in a location that can be easily reached so that cleaning and refilling will not pose a problem. Try to place other nectar-producing plants (see list) near the feeder; hummingbirds using these plants will get a more complete nutritional balance from the insects and nectar.

The feeding solution can be purchased. Often these commercial formulas will offer vitamins and minerals in addition to the sugar needed for energy. If you wish to make your own solution, mix 1 part of white granulated sugar in 4 parts of water; boil the solution for several minutes and store unused portions in the refrigerator. Boiling will retard mold growth and fermentation. Don't use a more concentrated sugar solution, because too much sugar has a toxic effect on the bird's liver. Don't use honey in the feeder either, because a fungal disease associated with honey may kill the hummingbirds. **Never** use artificial sweeteners in a hummingbird feeder - the birds may starve to death in a very short time if they are fooled by non-caloric sweeteners.

Hummingbirds are attracted to bright red and orange colors. The feeder should be painted or wrapped with red material to make it more easily found. Artificial food coloring should be avoided.

Other birds, especially House Finches, are frequently attracted to the sugar solution in hummingbird feeders. They can be a problem if they eat the supply in a short period of time or cause it to spill from

the feeder. This can be avoided if the feeder does not allow the birds to perch. Feeder designs that dispense the solution from a long, bent glass tube hanging below the reservoir should be avoided because the glass tube acts as a built-in perch. Keep this in mind when selecting a feeder. You may want to provide other feeders with sugar solutions for house finches and other birds.

Insects may also be attracted to the feeder in numbers that soon become a problem. If this happens, coat the wire or string that suspends the feeder with salad oil or petroleum jelly to prevent insects from reaching the solution.

Care of the feeder should include regular cleaning, especially when the feeder needs to be refilled. The sugar solution encourages the growth of molds, and thorough cleaning with hot water and a brush are needed to prevent undesirable side effects of mold on birds using the feeder. The feeder should also always have solution in it, or the birds will quickly move to other more profitable areas to feed.

The plants below will provide food for hummingbirds during certain months of the year. The growing requirements of each plant can be found in a reference book such as Sunset's Western Garden Book.

PLANTS TO ATTRACT HUMMINGBIRDS

Months:	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
<u>Perennials</u>								
Balloon Flower				x	x	x		
Beard Tongue (Penstemon)		x	x	x	x	x		
Bee Balm					x	x		
Bellflower				x	x			
Columbine			x	x	x			
Delphinium			x	x	x			
Gladiolus				x	x	x	x	
Globe Thistle					x	x		
Lupine			x	x	x	x		
Phlox			x	x	x	x		
<u>Annuals</u>								
Nasturtium			summer months					
Nicotiana			summer months					
Petunia			summer months					
Salvia			summer months					
Snapdragon			summer months					
<u>Vines</u>								
Clematis		flowering period depends on species						
Trumpet vine					x	x	x	
<u>Shrubs</u>								
Elderberry	x	x	x	x	x			
Fuchsia				x	x	x	x	x
Quince		x	x	x	x	x		
Red Flowering Currant	x	x	x	x				
Weigila			x	x				